

CULTURAL COALITION

serving southeastern & northeastern CT

P.O. Box 95, New London, CT 06320 | (860) 448-5135 | info@CultureSECT.org | www.CultureSECT.org

DATE: February 27, 2023
TO: Appropriations Committee
FROM: Wendy Bury, Executive Director, Cultural Coalition
RE: HB 6659 An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June 30, 2025,
And Making Appropriations Therefore

Dear Co-Chairs Osten and Walker, Vice Chairs Hartley, Exum and Paris; Ranking Members Berthel and Nuccio and members of the Appropriations Committee,

Unfortunately, I am not able to testify in person or on zoom due to a scheduling conflict.

On behalf of the Cultural Coalition, a nonprofit organization that serves 600 arts, cultural and creative businesses across 42 towns in eastern CT and one of eight Designated Regional Service Organizations for the CT Office of the Arts to oppose **HB 6659 An Act Concerning The State Budget For the Biennium Ending June 30, 2025, And Making Appropriations Therefore.**

We oppose the proposed budget simply because it underfunds arts, culture and tourism and returns funding to pre-pandemic levels, which was already historically inadequate and among the lowest per capita investment in New England. Public funding ensures the benefits of arts, culture and tourism accrue in every community, including rural areas and small towns, and not just in big cities or big organizations. The benefits are many and primarily: economy, health and well-being, communities and education.

Arts and culture make us stronger—as individuals, families, communities, and as a state. They are a backbone of innovation, prosperity, and thriving people and places. Public funding for arts and culture is a high return investment.

Arts and culture are a CT economic engine. They provide people with the foundation for creativity, equipping an innovative workforce, generating new ideas in every field, and keeping our state competitive. Arts and culture strengthen economic health by creating jobs in multiple industries, driving tourism, and providing opportunities for young people.

Arts and culture improve our health and well-being. They are one of the most effective treatments for trauma, depression and anxiety, including among our nation's veterans. Arts and creativity reduce our susceptibility to stress-related diseases.

Arts, culture and strengthen the fabric of CT's communities. They celebrate local culture—both cherished and new traditions—telling stories of people and places. Arts, culture and creativity promote connection and cohesion, foster the entrepreneurial spirit communities need to thrive, and create the kinds of communities where young people want to build families.

Arts, culture and creativity strengthen education. They set young people up for success, close the achievement gap and improve test scores. And they develop an innovative, competitive workforce by adding the key ingredient of creativity to STEAM education.

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The Cultural Coalition serves as the “voice” of the arts and cultural sector and the liaison between the sector and leadership entities invested in regional revitalization, and we provide core services to connect, strengthen, and advocate for the arts and cultural community. From sole proprietors, artists and small volunteer-run organizations, to historical societies and sites and professionally staffed museums, tourist attractions and arts centers, the Coalition includes a diverse cross section of nonprofit and for-profit individuals, businesses, groups and organizations.

Pre-pandemic, arts and culture were minimally funded yet represented 5% of CT’s economy, generated \$9 billion annually, and supported 57,000 jobs. CT’s nonprofit arts and cultural organizations generated \$800 million annually. Nonprofit arts and cultural economic activity in New London County alone, \$168 million, was greater than each of the following states: Vermont, Delaware and Maine (Arts & Economic Prosperity 5, Southeastern Connecticut, 2015). The small corner of the state packs an enormous economic punch, and represents 1/5 of the CT’s total nonprofit arts and cultural economic activity and attracts millions of visitors every year. (Data will be updated for the southeast region and new data for the northeast region is coming in fall 2023.)

Adequate funding, as proposed by the Arts, Culture and Tourism Funding Roadmap, would provide an investment that is:

- At a level that fully supports tourism and cultural organizations in making Connecticut a more attractive place to visit, work, and live.
- Consistent over time to minimize operational disruption, improve long-term planning and sustainability, and maximize the return on the state’s investment.
- Distributed so that arts and cultural organizations -- especially those that have been historically under-resourced -- have equal access to funding opportunities, and so that Connecticut can compete with neighboring states for visitors.
- Backed up metrics and data that demonstrate value.

Beyond their economic impact, arts and culture are central to the decision-making process for businesses, workers, families, and visitors. Investment in arts, culture and tourism is one of CT’s best economic and community development tools. Vibrant communities attract and retain residents, businesses, employees and tourists. Investment in arts, culture and tourism supports workforce development, innovation through cultivation of creative thinking, strong communities, and a major contributor to our quality of life.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Wendy Bury
Executive Director